



*Completed section of modular block retaining wall on Pulaski Tunnel Trail.*

*—Adapted from stories by Erika Kirsch, Shoshone News Press, and James Hagengruber, The Spokesman Review, August 21, 2005*

It was 95 years ago this past August when one of the worst forest fires in American history occurred in the Inland Northwest. On August 20, near Wallace, ID, a ceremony was held to officially dedicate a trail in honor of early Forest Service ranger Edward Pulaski, a veteran of the 1910 fires.

Pulaski is perhaps best known for the combination ax-hoe he developed as a firefighting tool, still in use today. However, it was the heroism he displayed on

August 20, 1910, for which he was being honored. It was on August 20 and 21, 1910, that the "Big Blowup" swept through 3 million acres along the Idaho-Montana border, destroying several towns and killing at least 85 people. Many firefighters found themselves trapped by the inferno, including Pulaski, who gathered up 45 men and led them into a mine adit south of Wallace.

Moments after Pulaski and the others reached the abandoned Nicholson Mine,

gas and smoke engulfed them. Some men panicked and cried, and others prayed, according to Pulaski's 1923 account of the fire. One of the firefighters tried to flee, prompting Pulaski to pull his Government-issued revolver and threaten anyone who tried to leave. By remaining in the mine, 39 of the 45 firefighters lived.

The Idaho Panhandle NFs are working with a broad group of partners to reconstruct the trail and interpret the story of ranger Pulaski and the 1910 fires. These fires had profound impacts on the lives of the people involved, as well as influencing how fires were fought and national forests administered for the rest of the 20th century.

The trail dedication took place 2 miles from where Pulaski and the others took refuge. The reconstructed trail leads to the remnants of the mine shaft, now closed because of safety concerns. Several dignitaries participated in the ceremony, including Idaho Senator Larry Craig, Department of Agriculture Undersecretary Mark Rey, Shoshone County Commissioner Jon Cantamessa, Idaho Panhandle NFs Forest Supervisor Ranotta McNair, and the Forest Service Honor Guard.

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Jim See of Wallace, and president of the private, nonprofit Pulaski Project, proposed the idea to rehabilitate the Pulaski Trail about 10 years ago. The project came to fruition with the cooperation of many officials and groups. Rey and McNair presented the Pulaski Project with a chrome Pulaski tool and Certificate of Appreciation in recognition of their efforts. Stated See, "We honor (Pulaski) with this trail, we honor the six men who died, and we honor all the wildland firefighters with this trail—past, present, and future." The Pulaski Tunnel Trail, complete with interpretive exhibits, will be opened for public use during the spring of 2006.